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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Tunguska: the truth
Strange Glastonbury
The curse on Killakee
CIA and the UFO cover up
The journey of the soul

53



THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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The early explorers of Africa did not believe that the 'dark continent' had ever been civilised. In **Lost civilisations** we trace the ancient cultures of such places as Great Zimbabwe and Meroë, capital of the kingdom of Kush. A strange tale follows about the young Hitler's fascination with the Habsburg spear – the lance that reputedly pierced Christ's side after the crucifixion: see the first of a new series, **Nazi occult**. We look at the reality behind the superstition in our last article on **Vampires**. And in **UFO Casebook** we examine the most amazing contactee case of all – the story of the Brazilian farmer who had sex with a voluptuous female humanoid. In a special article on **Extra-terrestrial intelligence**, we ask whether Tesla really did receive signals from outer space. And what of other technological evidence of alien contact?

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UFOs: the case for a cover up

The US government has long denied any interest in UFOs, yet keeps thousands of UFO documents on the secret list. WILLIAM H. SPAULDING tells how the cover was blown – and reveals a bizarre CIA plot to mislead the public

UFO RESEARCHERS HAVE long maintained that their governments know more about the UFO phenomenon than they officially admit. One reason for thinking this has been the unfailingly sceptical attitude taken by government officials when questioned about any particular sighting – even the best-documented reports are greeted with cries of ‘weather balloons’ or ‘the planet Venus seen under unusual conditions’. Another cause for suspicion has been the peculiar interest that UFOs take in military establishments from time to time. Some, at least, of the infamous men in black (see page 510) may have been genuine government agents, and the thought may linger in many ufologists’ minds that the MIB’s elusive nature is only the smoke of folklore behind which lurks the sinister fire of clandestine operations. In the

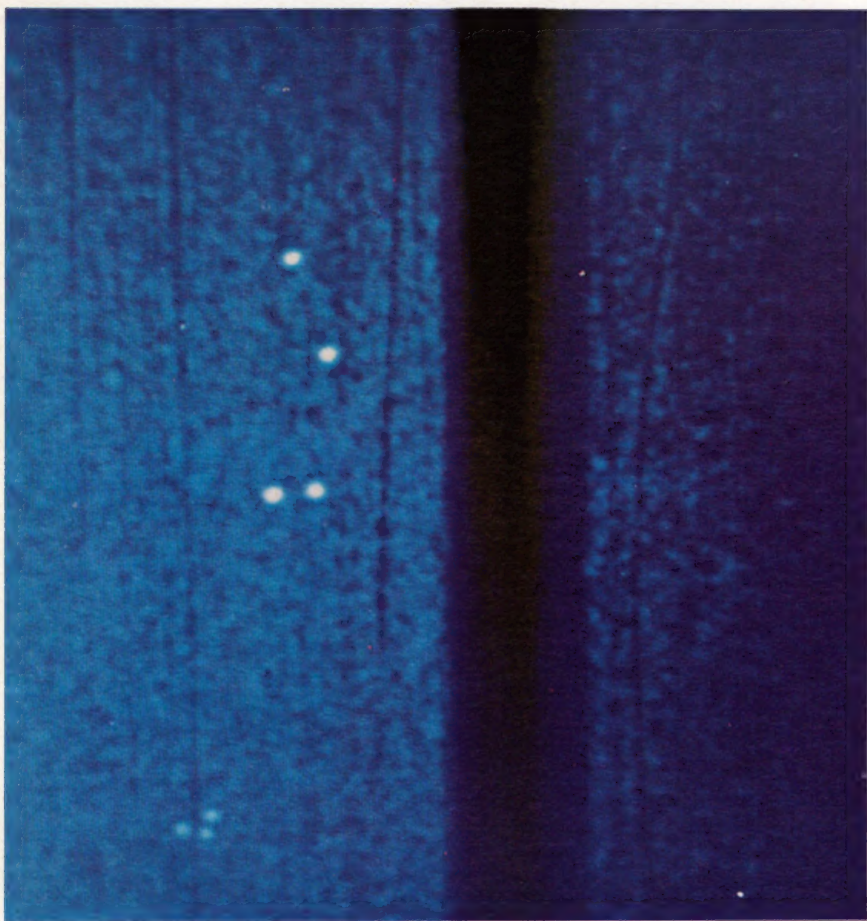
An unidentified flying object skims over the desert outside Phoenix, Arizona, on 12 September 1972. Checked by computerised enhancement techniques, the photograph has been declared genuine by Ground Saucer Watch. Despite evidence like this, secret government agencies like the CIA (inset: the agency’s official seal) deny the existence of UFOs

United States the idea of a deliberate government attack on ufology was confirmed for many by the publication in 1969 of the Condon Report, widely regarded as at best complacent or at worst wilfully ignorant.

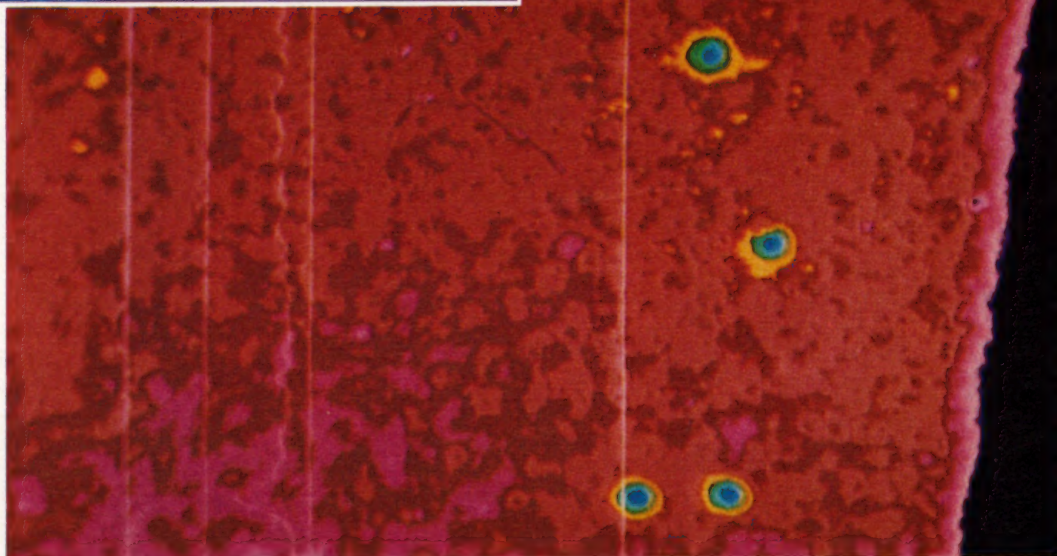
Documents obtained by Ground Saucer Watch (GSW) from the United States government under the Freedom of Information Act now confirm that there has indeed been a cover up – right from the start of the modern UFO era in the late 1940s. But what is revealed by the documents is not that there is a world-wide plot to hide the true nature of UFOs – involving secret contact with extraterrestrials or some gruesome conspiracy against humanity, or some other outlandish suggestion. What is indicated, rather, is that the US government wishes to maintain a certain public *attitude* toward UFOs.

This atmosphere of doubt and derision has been created in a number of ways. Anyone can offer more or less plausible explanations for a UFO sighting: bright planets, unusual atmospheric conditions, meteorites, aircraft and so on. This approach





Above: a still from the film shot by Delbert C. Newhouse on 2 July 1952, 7 miles (11 kilometres) north of Tremonton, Utah, USA. Newhouse saw 'gunmetal-coloured objects shaped like two saucers, one inverted on top of the other' near the eastern horizon. Mystified, he shot some 16-millimetre film of them. A few frames have been released to the public, but many more remain in CIA hands. Ground Saucer Watch analysed the available frames with a range of techniques that included colour contrasting (right) – which demonstrated that the objects were indeed solid. Sceptics have claimed the UFOs were birds or planes, but computerised images of these at comparable distances (centre right: a bird; far right: a plane) show quite different characteristics of shape, reflectivity and density. GSW concluded that the images represented craft about 50 feet (15 metres) in diameter and 5 to 7 miles (8 to 11 kilometres) distant



cannot help but be successful, since as many as 95 per cent of alleged UFOs are indeed misinterpretations of known objects. Some sceptical investigators maintain that if these statistics are valid, then *all* UFO reports must represent objects that could be identified, were sufficient information on each sighting available. How can the man in the street argue with logic like that?

The debunking campaign has been successful too because well-known military or government figures have weighed in against the UFO. Most people have an automatic respect for public figures, whose statements

are easily accepted. The few researchers who believed that they saw through the screen of official denials were easily dismissed as mavericks or cranks. There was, according to the official line, nothing to research. The government knew about everything there was to be seen in the sky.

But perhaps the cover up was so successful because no one could prove it was going on. There was no hard evidence to back the claim that the government was not being completely honest with the public.

And if the government knows so much, why haven't ex-employees come forward with their stories – revelations far more explosive, potentially, than any political scandal. Yet fewer than a dozen such individuals have come forward.

Despite all this, one's suspicions remain. Over the years GSW has encountered numerous incidents that showed every sign of direct or indirect government interference. Photographs went missing. Ground markings were ploughed under. Occasional witnesses talked about visits from military or intelligence officers who wanted to suppress the story of their UFO encounter. Too many cases came to an abrupt halt because some of the evidence

was missing, making it impossible to reach a firm conclusion.

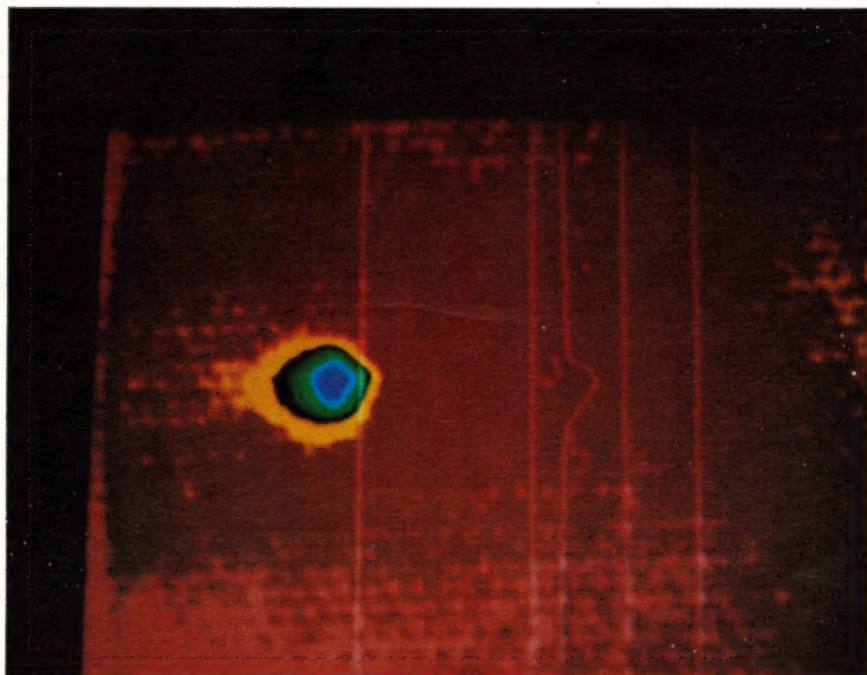
Largely at the insistence of Todd Zechel, GSW's director of research (and himself an ex-member of the intelligence community), it was decided to attack the issue head on – and approach the government directly. In the first place, GSW questioned the US Air Force – with predictable results. Typical replies were that 'the phenomenon does not represent any advanced technology beyond our present capability and . . . poses no direct threat to the United States.' And that 'there is no evidence indicating that sightings

categorized as "unidentified" are extra-terrestrial vehicles.' This was no more than expected; the next step was to confront the CIA – the agency most likely to be involved in suppressing UFO material. The CIA's reply – in a letter to GSW dated 26 March 1976 – is intriguing in the light of later events:

In order that you may be aware of the true facts concerning the involvement of the CIA in the investigation of UFO phenomena, let me give you the following brief history. Late in 1952, the National Security Council levied upon the CIA the requirement to determine if the existence of UFOs would create a danger to the security of the United States. The Office of Scientific Intelligence established the Intelligence Advisory Committee to study the matter. That committee made the recommendations [in] the *Robertson Panel Report*. At no time prior to the formation of the Robertson Panel and subsequent to this issuance of the panel's report [in January 1953], has the CIA engaged in the study of UFO phenomena. The *Robertson Panel Report* is the summation of the Agency's interest and



Above: research director Todd Zechel (left) and director William H. Spaulding (right) of Ground Saucer Watch, discussing the UFO problem



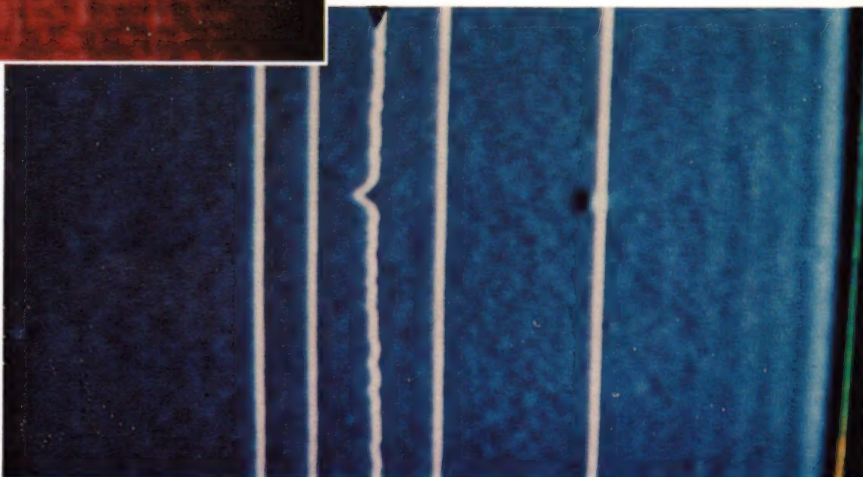
involvement in this matter. The Robertson Panel's conclusions – after an intensive briefing by top airmen, astronomers and several CIA men – were simple. There was no cause for alarm militarily or scientifically, but – significantly for our case – the panel concluded that 'the continued emphasis on the reporting of these phenomena does, in these perilous times, result in a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic.' Their recommendations were framed accordingly – debunk UFOs and educate people to recognise aerial phenomena.

In fact, the CIA did not let the matter drop there and then in 1953. Searches through the National Archives had shown that many reports were missing from the files. Dozens more letters to other agencies and even to the White House simply elicited the same official response – essentially, that UFOs did not exist. Why, then, the missing documents? When GSW made specific requests under the Freedom of Information Act a few papers were released – and so highly 'sanitised' that only a mind reader could have made sense of some of them. GSW then decided to attack in the courts. After 14 months of gruelling legal action the government released, on 15 December 1978, close to 1000 pages of documents. It was a major victory for GSW and ufology in general. What do the papers show?

First, that CIA involvement in UFOs actually pre-dates the National Security Council directive to set up what became the Robertson Panel – indeed it was the CIA that urged an investigation on the Council! Second, the implications for psychological warfare attract considerable attention. As one memo puts it, 'a fair proportion of our population is mentally conditioned to the acceptance of the incredible. In this fact lies the potential for the touching-off of mass hysteria and panic.' The third concern is with the vulnerability of US air defences: 'At any moment of attack . . . we cannot . . . distinguish hardware from phantom. . . .' The use of the word 'phantom' is interesting here. For another memo, from the Deputy Director for Intelligence, CIA, dated November 1952, says bluntly:

Sightings of unexplained objects at great altitudes and traveling at high speeds in the vicinity of major US defense installations are of such a nature that they are not attributable to natural phenomena or known types of aerial vehicles.

In the light of that it is not surprising that when Edward Tauss, then Acting Chief of the Weapons and Equipment Division of the Office of Scientific Intelligence, recommended that the CIA 'continue' (not 'begin') coverage of the subject in August 1952, he should add:



It is strongly urged, however, that no indication of CIA interest or concern reach the press or public, in view of their probably alarmist tendencies to accept such interest as 'confirmatory' of the soundness of 'unpublished facts in the hands of the US government'.

It is clear then that the government – or the CIA at least – believed in the reality of the UFO phenomenon. It was also alarmed by it. And it was determined to keep what it did know to itself.

Nor was the report of the Robertson Panel the last word, though the CIA pretended to accept its findings. The US Air Force, after all, maintained Project Blue Book until 1969, after the Condon Committee published its findings – though whether Blue Book was ever told the whole truth either by the USAF itself or by other defence agencies remains in

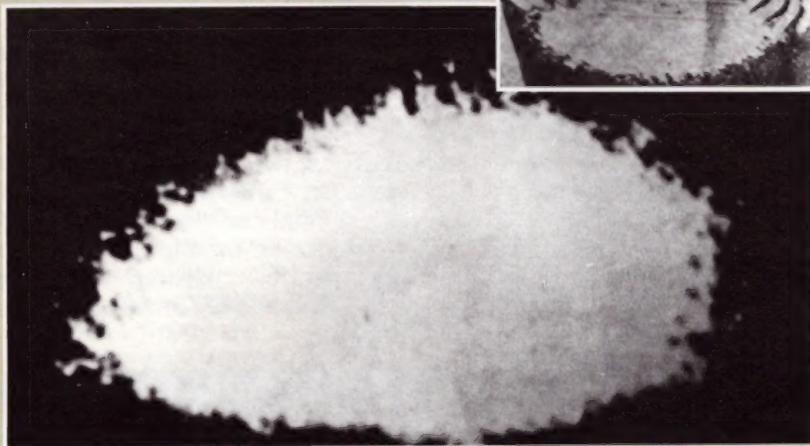
Right: the last members of Project Blue Book, the US Air Force's full-time UFO investigation unit, disbanded in 1969 while under the leadership of Major Hector Quintanilla (seated). The project's tiny staff was unable to deal in any depth with the thousands of UFO reports it received every year, suggesting that the USAF was dragging its feet over the UFO question. But the more likely explanation is that the real research was being done in secret by the CIA, leaving Blue Book as a public relations front



The marine, the CIA and the UFO

One of the oddest UFO cases on record is the 1952 sighting by US Marine Ralph Mayher (top). It is odd not because of the sighting itself, which was as 'normal' as any UFO event, but because of what happened afterward to Mayher and the film he managed to take.

Ralph Mayher had heard that on the night of 28 July 1952 a couple named Goldstein had seen a flying saucer near their home. He was an experienced movie photographer and was interested

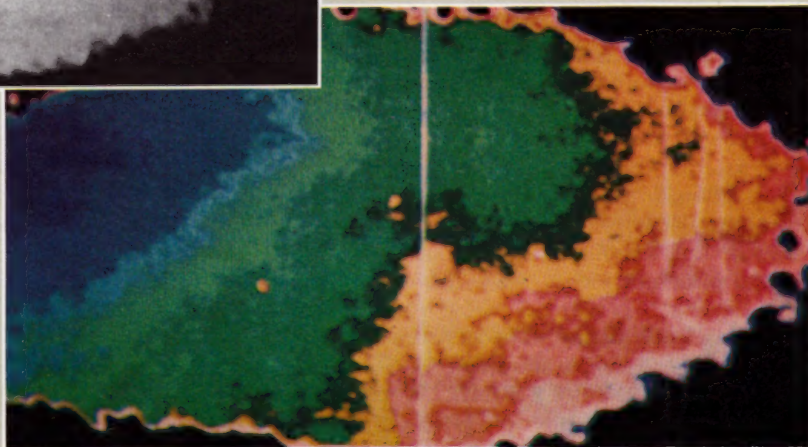


in UFOs, so he arranged to meet the Goldsteins the next day and rented a camera – he had a theory that saucers sometimes appear on consecutive nights. At 9.30 p.m. on 29 July Mayher heard a woman across the street shout that a UFO was in view. The Goldsteins and another neighbour, Herman Stern, also saw the object, which remained visible over the ocean for about three minutes. Mayher managed to shoot only some 40 frames of film because his view was obscured by

trees and buildings. The object was travelling horizontally toward the witnesses then 'turned' and shot away.

Mayher had his film processed at once and, as his unit commander had no objections, released some frames to the Miami press (centre) and even recorded a radio interview. But within 48 hours, USAF investigators were on the scene and threw a security blanket over the case. Mayher was visited by a number of men with CIA credentials, who apparently told him to keep quiet about the event. On enquiry Mayher was also told that the USAF thought the 'pinpoints of light' (*sic*) too small to analyse properly. But the film was never returned.

Perhaps the strangest part of the story is that while well-informed UFO investigators like Major Donald Keyhoe heard nothing of the film, ace debunker Dr Donald Menzel soon became familiar with it. With surreal inventiveness, Menzel said it showed a cobweb. GSW's computer analysis (bottom) indicates that the object is solid, 50 feet (15 metres) in diameter, and travelling at 2500 miles per hour (4000 km/h).



some doubt. The probable fate of the film taken by US Navy Warrant Officer Delbert C. Newhouse in 1952 – the ‘Tremonton movie’ that was shown to the Robertson Panel – is one indication of the CIA’s true reaction to the evidence.

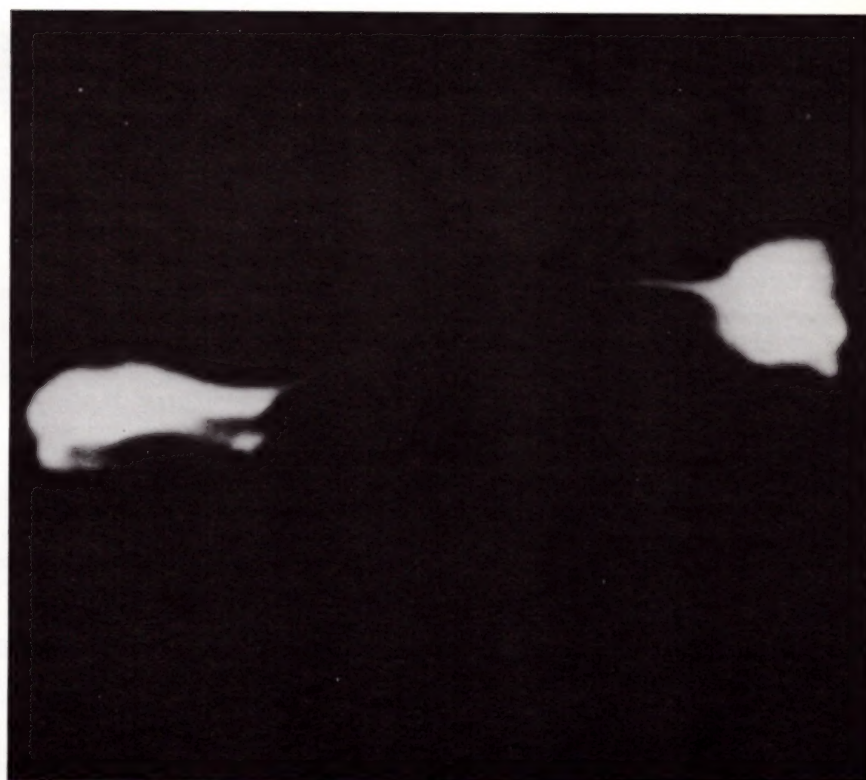
This film has been subject to several attempts at debunking. According to the witness, it shows a number of unusual craft travelling at enormous speed some 10 miles (16 kilometres) from the camera. Newhouse’s report of the incident (he was a trained Navy photographer) is confirmed by GSW’s computerised tests on the film – as it was by the USAF photo laboratory at Wright-Patterson AFB, who first analysed it. The film was then handed to the Naval Photographic Interpretation Center (NavPIC) at Anacostia, Maryland, and subjected to over 1000 man-hours of study. The Navy had no explanation for the objects but said they appeared to be ‘self-luminous’ spheres travelling at up to 7560 miles per hour (12,096 km/h). The Robertson Panel argued over the film for about two hours. They were also shown film of seagulls giving intense reflections of light in bright sunshine. The panel duly reported that ‘the objects were considered strongly to represent birds.’

Who laid on that film of seagulls? Was it the CIA, experienced hands as they were at manipulation and suggestion? What they did not do was stop studying films of UFOs. As soon as the Robertson Panel had reported, NavPIC was dissolved. Some of its members, however, were moved to the CIA to form the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC). Material dating from at least 1950 is kept there. Says GSW’s Todd Zechel: ‘There is a direct link between NavPIC’s work on the Tremonton analysis and the decision of the CIA to place the analysis programme under its direct authority. In other words, rather than thinking the Tremonton analysis was in error, as has been purported, the CIA was impressed enough to immediately transfer the project to its headquarters.’

A cover for the CIA

Small wonder, then, that the USAF’s Project Blue Book got such short shrift. According to Todd Zechel, Blue Book was ‘in reality . . . no more than a PR front, primarily covering for the secret research being conducted by the CIA. . . . to give Blue Book full support would have been a waste, since it would have been duplicating research already being conducted by the CIA. Therefore, and for the most part unwittingly, Blue Book’s façade enabled the CIA to pull off the greatest propaganda fraud in history.’

The documents obtained by GSW support the view that the CIA has persisted in UFO research. Among them are numerous reports, dutifully filed by US embassies abroad, of UFO sightings: 25 cases from Spain alone in one nine-month period between 1973 and 1974, a case from Portugal, multiple events



An unexplained mass of light seen over Ibiza in May 1974, which remained stationary for a brief period before rapidly climbing to a high altitude and vanishing. Reports such as this have been collected by the CIA from all over the world. Despite official claims that the agency ceased to have an interest in UFOs in 1953, documents have been obtained from CIA archives detailing sightings as late as 1976

in Tunisia in 1976 with many witnesses, radar tracking and police reports. ‘A very concerned Chief of Military Security, General Balma’ wanted to know if the US Sixth Fleet could ‘shed any light on who or what they might be’. Not only was this – and innumerable other cases – being reported in 1976, seven years after the US government had supposedly given up its interest in UFOs in the wake of the Condon Report, but all UFO reports from the embassies are sent to the CIA – and the even more shadowy Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State.

Of course it is in the government’s interests to pretend that it can identify everything in the sky: the security of the Western Alliance depends on that assumption. But the evidence indicates that the cover up does not stop at a desire to prevent alarm and despondency from spreading among the people. Just the opposite, if you happen to be a witness to a UFO: agents from the CIA Directorate of Operations (Clandestine Services) and Domestic Operations Division (sometimes called the ‘Contact Division’) have been known to harass, intimidate and silence people (see box).

Further to this, a more sinister game is perhaps being played out. For while the intelligence services attempt to deflate the UFO controversy, it would seem that they are also helping to feed it. It is to this aspect of the cover up, and the possible reasons for it, that we turn next.

Are UFOs the secret weapons of the CIA’s psychological warfare experts? See page 1086

A very strange place

Were the messages in the Glastonbury scripts really from the spirit world – or did they, as Frederick Bligh Bond himself believed, originate in his own unconscious? COLIN WILSON assesses this strange case



THE STORY OF THE DISMISSAL of Frederick Bligh Bond from the excavations at Glastonbury is one of the seediest tales in the history of British archaeology. The abbey trustees even ordered that all Bond's books should be removed from sale in the abbey book store, including the purely technical *Architectural handbook to Glastonbury Abbey*. The Church of England was alarmed to discover that his highly successful investigations and his remarkable discoveries were the result of 'seances' with long-dead monks, and it went out of its way to prevent Bond carrying out any further excavations.

Bond lived for almost another quarter-century; he spent much of this time in America, and did a great deal of valuable and interesting work in psychical research. But he was a lonely and embittered man, whose heart remained in Glastonbury Abbey. The trustees even banned him from the abbey grounds. In 1937 a group of American friends put up the money for more excavations at Glastonbury, to test some of the information given by the 'watchers' of Glastonbury, and the trustees gave the group permission. But the moment they heard that





Bond was involved they cancelled it. He died, poor and forgotten, in 1945.

The situation is absurd, almost unbelievable. Between 1909 and 1920 this man proved that his unorthodox methods could lead to spectacular results. Almost single-handed, he rediscovered secrets that had been buried for four centuries. But these discoveries – such as the Edgar Chapel – utilised only a small part of the information obtained from the ‘communicators’. Other communications – including some he received after leaving Glastonbury – included information about the tomb of King Arthur, secret passageways, the Holy Grail and several stores of buried treasure. There is still enough assorted information to keep archaeologists busy for another 20 years. The most fascinating part of Bond’s life-work still remains to be completed. Yet the abbey trustees are apparently determined that it shall not be completed.

Why is the Church of England still so hostile to this whole notion of ‘psychic archaeology’? No doubt because to accept it would imply an acceptance of some of the doctrines of ‘Spiritualism’. And this is a matter about which the Church seems determined not to give any definite pronouncements. In 1936 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, commissioned a special report on Spiritualism, and his committee

Glastonbury is one of England’s most ancient and mysterious sacred places – so perhaps it is not surprising that it should have been the site of an early and successful experiment in psychic archaeology. The Tor (above left) is a conspicuous landmark that is believed by many to be a centre of some kind of spiritual power. Legend has it that the Holy Thorn within the abbey grounds (above) is descended from one planted by St Joseph of Arimathea, who visited Britain with the infant Jesus, his nephew. King Arthur (left) was reputedly buried in the abbey nave; he lies sleeping, ready to come to the aid of Britain in its hour of need. The Chalice Well, at the foot of the Tor, is also part of the Arthurian legend; its cover (right), designed by Frederick Bligh Bond, carries the ancient symbol of the *vesica piscis*, which represents the source of life

agonised over the question for three years. They ended up by stating that the claims of Spiritualism are probably true, and that there is nothing in the idea of ‘communication with the dead’ that contradicts the ideas of Christianity. But the report ended with a curious footnote: ‘The committee do not recommend that any publicity be given to this.’ The Archbishop agreed, and suppressed it. The report was not finally published until March 1979.

Depths of the unconscious

Curiously, where the unfortunate Frederick Bligh Bond is concerned, the absurdity is that he did *not* believe he was communicating with the dead. The title of his book, *The gate of remembrance*, tells us what he had finally come to believe: that his own unconscious mind had somehow gained access to a vast store of unconscious memory about Glastonbury. He wrote: ‘From the depths of the subconscious mind, [the power of intuition] has evoked these images. . . .’

It was understandable that Bond should take such a view. He was a member of the Society for Psychical Research, and a friend of Sir William Barrett, who had written a classic book on dowsing. And what fascinated Barrett was that a good dowser seems to possess a form of ‘second sight’ (or, as Barrett preferred to call it, ‘cryptesthesia’). A certain female dowser, for example, was not only able to pinpoint the exact location of an underground cistern, but was also able to



Avalon, the Isle of Apples, elusive place of enchantments, where the soil yields crops without sowing and whose happy inhabitants enjoy eternal life, is an integral part of the Arthurian tradition. It was to Avalon, so the legend goes, that Arthur was taken after his last battle, and there he lives on, ready one day to come to the aid of the Celtic peoples and restore them to their rightful sovereignty over their land.

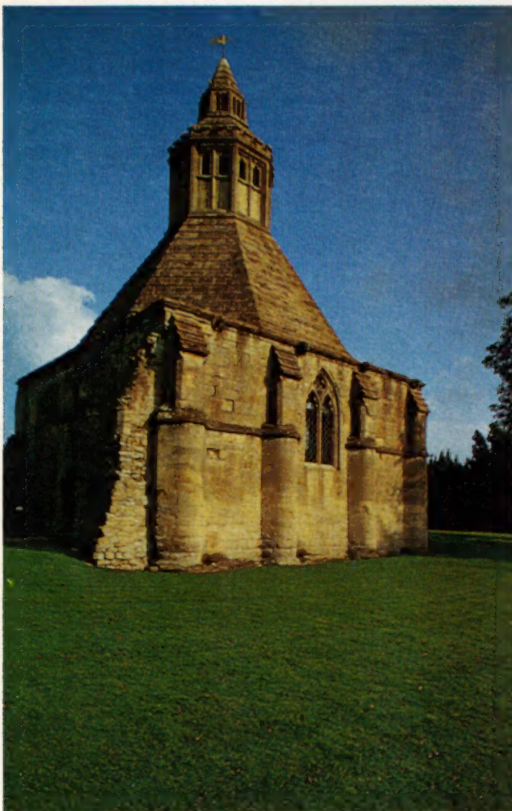
That, at least, is the substance of the so-called 'Breton hope' – and as long as Arthur's burial place remained unknown, this hope continued to be nurtured. But in 1191 came the discovery at Glastonbury of a tomb carrying the

Where was Avalon?

inscription 'Here lies the famous King Arthur, buried in the Isle of Avalon'. The Breton hope seemed dashed.

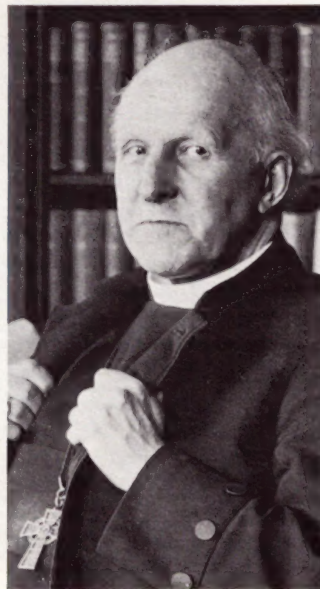
Is Glastonbury really Avalon? The group of hills surrounding Glastonbury has been known as 'the Isle of Avalon' since the opening of the alleged tomb of Arthur, and possibly for much longer. And in the early Christian period, when sea level is known to have been much higher than it is today, the hills and the high ground between them would almost have formed an island.

But the proof is not conclusive – and some people still cherish a faint hope that, after all, the magical island dreamed of by the ancients really exists.



describe exactly what it looked like, as if her eyes could see through the ground.

But some dowsers have been able to do even stranger things. The Abbé Mermet – a perfectly respectable Catholic – was able to locate all kinds of things simply by dangling a pendulum over a map. So, for example, in 1934 the Marquis de la Chevalerie asked the Abbé if he could help him locate the bones of one of his ancestors. The Abbé dangled his pendulum over a plan of the chapel, and replied that he could find no trace of the ancestor, but that under the altar there were the bones of another man at a depth of 6 feet (2 metres), together with some tin, copper and gold. The Marquis gave orders for excavation, and they discovered a coffin containing the bones of Saint Victor, presented by



Above: Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in 1936, commissioned a report on Spiritualism. The findings were, surprisingly, not unfavourable – but the report ended with the curious recommendation that no publicity be given to the investigation

Pope Gregory XVI; the coffin was embossed in tin, copper and gold, just as the Abbé Mermet had described.

Mermet was also successful in locating minerals, oil, treasure and sunken ships, as well as an expedition lost at the North Pole. But the discovery of the bones of Saint Victor is relevant here because it is so similar to what Bond and Bartlett did. And if we can accept – like Sir William Barrett – that dowsing is a peculiar faculty of the unconscious mind, then there really seems no reason why Bond and Bartlett should not have used some form of unconscious dowsing to find the Edgar Chapel.

But anyone who reads *The gate of remembrance* will see that this raises an interesting problem. For the various monks who communicated with Bond are all very distinct personalities. There was Ambrosius the cellarer, who told charming stories about the



Left: the Abbot's Kitchen, built 'to make feast on grete feast-days', according to a communicator named Ricardus. Another monk, Ambrosius the cellarer – who, Ricardus remarks pointedly, 'isne a scholar' – tells how one of the monks drank himself unconscious in front of Henry VIII (right), when he was being entertained by the Abbot. The abbey was subsequently destroyed by Henry

alcohol drunk by the monks (and how one of them drank himself unconscious in front of Henry VIII); Peter Lightfoot, the clock-maker, who told how the abbey clock came to be built because the monks of Glastonbury became jealous when they heard about the one in Wells Cathedral; Johannes Bryant, who has beautiful descriptions of nature and of the abbey's mint garden. Then there was Abbot Bere, who described how he decided to build the Loretto Chapel. He was a huge, fat man and, as he was riding along on his mule, he was attacked by 'rude men', and he rolled down a steep slope. He said a hasty prayer to Our Lady, and his cloak caught on a thorn bush, preventing him rolling over the edge – whereupon he made a vow to build the Loretto Chapel to the Virgin. . . . The 'watchers' also told the sad story of the miscalculation that led to the downfall of Glastonbury Abbey. When Abbot Bere died, the King's adviser Cardinal Wolsey appointed Richard Whyting Abbot, and advised him to invite the King to Glastonbury to try to gain his goodwill. It was a disastrous mistake. The King was royally entertained; but when he saw the abbey's treasures and its lands and farms, he licked his lips and calculated how much all this would add to the royal treasury. So after Henry's break with Rome, Thomas Cromwell had no difficulty 'framing' the monks on a number of false charges; and Henry seized the abbey and destroyed it.

As we read stories as circumstantial as this, it becomes very difficult to swallow the theory that they originate from some kind of 'racial memory'. Either the story is an amusing invention of Bond's unconscious mind, or it is a genuine communication from someone who was there at the time.

Yet the Glastonbury scripts contain one clue that implies that the truth may be even more fascinating and complex. At one point the monk Johannes says,

Why cling I to that which is not? It is I, and it is not I, butt parte of me which dwelleth in the past and is bound to that which my carnal soul loved and called 'home' these many years. Yet I, Johannes, am of many partes and ye better parte doeth other things – *Laus, Laus Deo!* – only that part which remembereth clingeth like memory to what it seeth not. . . .

Multiple personalities

'I, Johannes, am of many partes. . . .' This is a puzzling statement, yet one that is supported, for example, by the baffling evidence of so-called 'multiple personalities' – people like the heroine of *The three faces of Eve*, who periodically lose their memory and become a completely different person. Perhaps our greatest error is in thinking of ourselves as 'individuals', single and indivisible. Perhaps every one of us contains a whole crowd of different people. And perhaps the ghosts that haunt the scenes of old



Above: the cathedral clock at Wells. The monks told how improvements were carried out at Glastonbury to rival the beauty of Wells, 'new and faire with carven stone'

tragedies are disjointed personality fragments, left behind like a fragment of tape recording.

But in assessing the evidence about the 'watchers', the 'Company of Avalon' that spoke to Bond through automatic writing, we should also bear in mind that Glastonbury is a place of power, a religious site chosen because the ground seems to concentrate some unknown force – possibly something as simple as a vortex in the Earth's magnetic field. If the late T. C. Lethbridge was correct to believe that 'ghosts' are some kind of tape-recording (see page 654) then perhaps Glastonbury is a vast repository of recordings from the past. If so, it seems reasonable to suppose that other ancient sites conceal similar stores of information – and, on this hypothesis, it might be worthwhile for archaeologists to consider trying to develop methods of 'tuning in' to this secret knowledge. Perhaps Bond's real importance is that he was the first man to stumble on a treasure house that will be explored, documented and catalogued by a new generation of researchers.

Further reading

Frederick Bligh Bond, *The gate of remembrance*, Blackwell 1918
Frederick Bligh Bond, *The Company of Avalon*, Blackwell 1924

The journey of the soul

Do the souls of the dead live on? Do they go to heaven, hell, purgatory – or to some other, as yet unknown, plane of existence? And if they do continue to exist, how do we know about their experiences? PAUL BEARD surveys the evidence for the afterlife

EVEN AMONG PEOPLE who believe in some kind of an afterlife, alleged communications from the 'other side' are frequently regarded with suspicion. Perhaps it is natural to ascribe such accounts to the result of wishful thinking or unjustified hopes and fears (see page 681). For this reason most people are unaware of the enormous amount of material purporting to describe the next world from people *who are now there*. But if, for a moment, we suspend our disbelief, what emerges from this material is not only evidence for an afterlife but an amazingly consistent description of what it is like to be dead.

Obviously these accounts cannot be checked, and examining them in an open, unprejudiced way is not easy. The basic issue is one of testimony: who are the witnesses – the communicators and the living people who receive their messages?

Bearing witness

Although there are many 'communicators' and just as many 'mediums' or sensitives, not all bear the marks of good witnesses. If the dead speak to us at all, their task cannot be easy; but this does not mean that we should feel obliged to accept any communication no matter how garbled or trivial. We are entitled to listen to only the best – the most balanced, consistent and rational – accounts. In England the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and the College for Psychic Studies have accrued a vast amount of material, which seems to emanate from intelligent and honest sources, that has been given to reputable mediums over the past 100 years or so. In the end we ourselves have to judge the communications on their own merits and on the responses they awaken in us. But a good witness is worthy of a good listener. So what do the majority of these accounts tell us?

If we do indeed survive death, then by definition the surviving part of us must already be present within us during our life on earth. The first feature of the accounts is that we do indeed take with us the same memory bank, and the same emotions and mental concepts that we had before death. We start from where we left off. But which of us survives: the tired elderly man, or the one

in vigorous prime, or even the one full of illusory youthful ideals? The answer, judging by the mass of evidence, points to our having available the private, inward contents of *all* these various 'past selves'; we can reside in them temporarily, or hold on to one aspect or the other. All these imperfect selves have made us what we are; we are said to meet them all in turn again after death, in order to understand them as they really were, and profit by re-experiencing them.

A good witness is Mrs Winifred Coombe-Tennant, known in psychic circles as 'Mrs Willett'. In life she was one of the first English women JPs and a delegate to the League of Nations. She also took part as a non-professional sensitive in the cross-correspondences, which form a highlight in the multiplicity of evidence collected by the SPR (see page 478). After her death, medium Geraldine Cummins received an enormous amount of material (in the form of automatic writing) purporting to come from the disincarnate Mrs Coombe-Tennant. Much of this describes the afterlife as she had experienced it. Of the 'many selves' enigma she says:

A human being consists of a number of selves or aspects with a primary self, the total of a sum in arithmetic. . . . We only become unified in spirit on the higher level.

Dying, it seems, is not the absolute event most people fear; largely, it appears to be a state of altered consciousness. Evidence points to it being harder after death to get rid of the old earthly self than we had supposed. The same personal limitations continue until we resolve them. Death does not in itself change us; it gives us a different kind of opportunity to change ourselves.

In the seventh heaven

In spiritualistic communications, life after death is often described as a progress through seven spheres, each of a more rarified and spiritually invigorating nature than the last. The seven spheres – or mansions, or staging posts – basically represent levels of consciousness, and any of these levels is reached only by a widening and deepening of the moral nature. One is helped by teachers of superior moral stature who have progressed, so to speak, beyond the scope of recent arrivals, but who adapt themselves temporarily to make themselves understood. After death one must realise that life continues as a process of learning.

The great majority of communicators describe the death process itself as one of peacefulness and freedom from pain, even if, during the last hours, the physical body had shown every outward appearance of distress. Communicators often say this apparent pain





Left: *The garden of earthly delights* by Hieronymus Bosch. He saw the average man's ideal world as totally physical – and, ultimately, totally degrading

Below: the traditional Christian belief in a day of reckoning, as portrayed in Fra Angelico's *The day of judgement*

Bottom: T.E. Lawrence, better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia', who died in 1935. In life a brilliant yet difficult man, he was obliged to confront certain unappealing aspects of his character – 'the monk and the prig' – in the afterlife, in order to progress to higher planes

did not register with them. They say death is a gradual withdrawing, often accompanied by alternating periods of sleep or unconsciousness. Then they describe 'waking up' and being greeted by those they had deeply loved who had died previously – and also by others, familiar or not yet familiar, who will be found to know them intimately, even their secret selves. These are not angels sitting in judgement, but more highly developed spirits. Frequently an encounter with them is found to be disturbing. As one newly dead doctor of divinity is purported to have said of such a meeting:

He evidently regarded my whole life on earth – which hitherto I have thought of as being so important – as mere preparation, a preliminary to the real work I have to do here. That has been one of the greatest surprises.

Experiences are, apparently, by no means uniform, and naturally enough are partly determined by old patterns of behaviour and thinking. This first plane of experience is



exactly – and literally – what you make of it. According to all communicators, the imagination is supreme; just by thinking of something it appears. Some have given this plane the term 'ideo-plastic', meaning creation through ideas alone. Some create around them past environments of home and possessions that they are unwilling to relinquish. The important key to understanding this plane is that matter is now reported to be of a finer texture, highly malleable to thought. Some, who had not believed in an afterlife, even fail to recognise they are dead. They feel they must be in a vivid dream.

But willing pupils in this environment – called the *summerland*, says the posthumous Frederic Myers – can create what they most desired on earth. But this is not 'heaven' as more enlightened communicators hasten to point out. Summerland in time shows that these 'dreams' are after all not wise enough, nor spiritual enough; they are gradually found to be too selfish and materialistic. People may find that they are seeking little

Survival of death

more than a kind of perpetual summer holiday. Yet many accounts stress that the purpose of summerland is to enable its inhabitants to find that much of what they thought valuable is valueless.

But what sort of world does a man find around himself, if his life has been devoted to selfish gain, or if he has fallen prey to crime and violence? The habits of his mind remain the same and so, as in life, he finds he can contribute very little to his after-death environment. His self-absorption has cut him off from being able to enjoy any wider, disinterested feelings, which make up true companionship. As in the summerland his environment reflects himself – and his poverty of soul assumes an awful 'reality'. Many accounts tell of darkness, mist, bare earth and a hovel to live in. This is *winterland*.

In his continuing selfishness such a spirit often feels anger and indignation for his lot. Neither he nor others in that condition can please one another, for all are equally selfish. More unfortunately, he often treats with contempt those who enter his world from

The prophet Mohammad journeys to the seven heavens, as depicted in an early 16th-century Persian painting. The idea that the afterlife is a continuing process, involving the soul's ascent through various stages of enlightenment, is a belief common to many different religions



their own superior realms of freedom, who wish to help and teach him how to change. But frequently such a person is said to stop his ears, much as he often stopped them in life to the promptings of his conscience.

Yet it would be hard to find a man who is totally degraded, and each of these unfortunates who finds himself in winterland is there for only as long as he refuses to listen to the other, higher part of himself. Those who try to help him are really looking for this better self, however deeply overlaid. It is stressed that these individuals are not being 'punished'; their suffering stems only from their own nature as they have created it; and it is fully in their power to regenerate it. They can discover and build on their latent qualities, just as can those who find themselves in the summerland. And just as summerland is not 'heaven', neither is winterland 'hell'. Both states exist because of the individual's inner self. When he becomes more spiritual they are transcended.

Those who have outgrown the summerland state pass on to the *first heaven*. Here selfless ideals can be developed in a life shared with those who also wish to serve others. Its joys are not passive, however; they are certainly to be enjoyed, yet used strenuously to obtain growth of spiritual stature. But this level of consciousness is superior to that of the summerland. The soul is shown, step by step, its nature as it was when on earth. This self-knowledge includes the revelation and re-evaluation of all faults, errors and blindnesses – many of them, even at this stage, hard to accept. Faults easy to excuse on earth, or to hide from oneself, now show up in their true shape.

As others see us

This process is usually named the *judgement*. It is widely reported by communicators that the judgement is not made by God (as in the popular idea of 'the day of judgement'), nor by some superior being sitting in condemnation, but is in some way self-induced. To see, and then to have to condemn oneself, is painful, the more so since many faults now revealed were formerly unsuspected. The posthumous T.E. Lawrence is said to have recognised the monk and the prig in him, which had led him to reject women's values, and brought about what he now says is a travesty of the man he could have been. The judgement shows what one has made of oneself, and it is more often than not a painful experience. But once recognised these faults can be transcended, creating a different self.

The judgement usually extends over a considerable period of experiences and adjustments; it also of course includes recognition of those qualities and actions that are worthy – in this sense life in the first heaven is part of the judgement. Though judgement is carried out by oneself, loving companions are there to explain, support and give

guidance for necessary corrective steps. W. V. Blewett, a former agricultural scientist, is believed to have said, 'Here we receive absolute justice, such as can never be possible on earth.'

Motive is shown to be paramount. Hence one's actions are shown as they really were, not as one preferred to think them; and whatever joy or suffering they brought about in others is now exactly felt and experienced oneself. This can be very painful without the deadening effect of the physical body, in the same way that emotions felt in dreams – love, fear, disgust – are sharply defined as if suddenly in focus, whereas the same emotions felt in our everyday lives are muffled by the demands and stimuli of the outside world. Here there is no 'outside world' – it is all 'inside', all experienced with the awful, or beautiful, clarity of dreaming.

From what we can piece together, the various 'stages' of the afterlife can be experienced one after the other – and most frequently are – but sometimes the discarnate spirit can work at several tasks at the



Above: a Hindu statue of an *apsaras*, who is believed to gratify men's sexual desires in paradise. Most ancient religions – with the exception of puritan Christianity – imagine paradise, or heaven, to comprise endless feasting, drinking, idleness and sex in scented gardens. The indications are that the first stage of the afterlife is indeed a place where one's dreams come true



Left: William Blake's illustration for Robert Blair's *The grave*, 1813, showing the newly freed spirit rising from the shrouded corpse, keys in hand, to open the way to a blissful future

same time or go from one to the other alternately. There seems to be no rigid plan to which every person must adhere; as on earth, all people are individuals with different needs, and these are allowed for.

But most communicators express difficulty in conveying to us that their surroundings, seemingly much as on earth, are actually part of a wonderful mental world, and are much more malleable to thought than dense earth matter. All is permeated by the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of those at a common level of consciousness. The mental-emotional environment to which one belongs is not isolated, however; it is also influenced or 'played upon' by the consciousness of

those at higher levels, in a way that is as sustaining and invigorating as sunlight.

How far and how much we can see is, as always, bounded by our own limited consciousness; being played upon from higher levels is aimed at helping us gradually to enlarge our vision, somewhat in the way we learn on earth from a teacher's entire personality and not merely from the facts he passes on. But exactly what is learned on this plane is difficult for us to imagine. It can hardly be of a mechanical or practical nature for physical objects no longer exist. And it is unlikely, in the circumstances, to entail philosophical discussion about the 'nature of life'. Learning must be confined to lessons of a moral or spiritual nature, as indeed many communicators describe. But such a formidable course of study begins only when the student is ready – and eager – for it.

Each succeeding level is shut off from us until we are in a fit state to appreciate it. It is possible that some souls never rise above the 'summer holiday' plane of the summerland. It seems more likely, however, that everyone progresses to higher planes, but at his or her own pace.

These events – life in the summerland, winterland, the first heaven, and the process of the judgement – form what is meant by the 'astral' or 'desire' world of consciousness. Each man now begins to learn that it is necessary to leave this plane behind, to shed it in order to win the freedom to dwell in the most spiritual parts of himself.

Surrender of the self

The experience that many believe now awaits him is known as the *second death*. Each must now gradually become as willing to yield up his present values as, in very many cases, he was ready in the end to shed his earthly body on death. His desires in the astral world, however much they have included love of others, good fellowship and companionship, have also, as he now begins to see with certainty, really largely centred upon himself. Even when he loved others, much of this was for his own emotional satisfaction. Now in the second death he sheds all he has valued; his achievements and all the things he has won in the desire world (of which earth too is a part) have now to be given up. His gifts no longer exist for him but for the glory of God. Conan Doyle, in describing his own posthumous experience, calls this transition 'terrible and marvellous', adding that 'there are no trimmings on a man after the second death.' Yet this traumatic experience prepares the student, shorn of his most dearly held pretensions, for the next stage in his progress. Through this he can begin to find his 'true self'; a larger, more complete being – one, he discovers, for which he has always been searching.

What happens to the soul next? And do we ever come back from the afterlife? See page 1094



The curse on Killakee

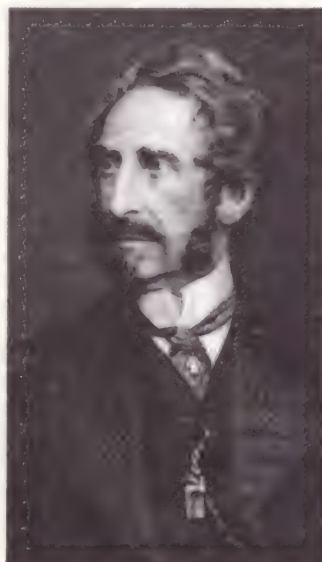
From the days of the Dublin Hell Fire Club to the times of the Troubles, the history of Killakee House was stained by violence and bloodshed. FRANK SMYTH tells the story of this disturbed past and its modern legacy: hauntings by a frightening supernatural beast

THE VICTORIAN WRITER E. Bulwer-Lytton used the phrase *Haunters and haunted* as a title for a celebrated story. He implied by the phrase that there was a definite relationship between the phenomena witnessed at a haunted house and the people who witnessed them – it was not a matter of chance that one person should see a ghost while another did not do so.

This certainly seems to be true in many well-attested poltergeist cases. These disturbances frequently centre on adolescents, and several researchers go so far as to claim that in such cases the 'haunters' emanate from the minds of the 'haunted' themselves, and are simply physical manifestations of teenage traumas. In other cases the person most closely involved in the phenomena appears to act as a catalyst for an already well-established haunting, fanning its embers into flame by his mere presence.

A combination of these factors may have been present when Killakee House in County Dublin became the centre of a veritable storm of psychic activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The onset of the phenomena occurred when new residents

A story by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (below) suggests that hauntings can be caused by their 'victims'. Did something like this happen at Killakee House?



moved in, and ended when they left.

Killakee lies in the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains, overlooking the city of Dublin. Killakee House, built in the early 18th century as the dower house of the Massey family, is a robust stone building with a small tower. Behind the house rises the steep slope of Montpelier Hill, its scrubby grass worn bare by the feet of tourists hardy enough to make the ascent to the top. On the summit stands the stone shell of a fire-ravaged hunting lodge, constructed by the Earl of Rosse in the 18th century. It was used by him and such 'bucks' as Harry Barry, first Lord Santry, and Richard 'Burnchapel' Whaley as the headquarters of the Dublin Hell Fire Club – a close imitation of the contemporary English version founded by Sir Francis Dashwood.

Rosse had a cruel sense of humour and a hatred of black cats. He used to hold court at the Eagle Tavern on Cork Hill in Dublin. On one occasion, to frighten the local inhabitants, he doused a black cat in spirits, set it alight and watched it run screaming down the hill. Dubliners swore that it was the Devil himself.

There is strong evidence that Rosse's brutal and puerile humour was given play at the hunting lodge on Montpelier Hill. On one occasion, after a black mass, he put a black cat in the seat of honour when Satan failed to turn up in person. It was also said that a half-witted dwarf with a twisted body

and unnaturally large head was beaten to death by Rosse and his cronies, shortly before the lodge burned down in the 1750s.

Rosse's friends often lodged with him in Killakee House and violent scenes often took place there. The Irish rakes were addicted to pistol duelling (one of the first questions asked by a prospective father-in-law of a noble suitor was 'do you blaze?', meaning 'do you fight duels?'). At least three deaths from duelling took place in the grounds.

Violence renewed

After a long interval that was relatively untroubled, there was again bloodshed at the house in the early 20th century. The house was then occupied by Countess Constance Markievicz, the 'Red Countess'. A friend of the mystical poet William Butler Yeats, she was the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons, although she never took her seat. The Countess participated in the 1916 rebellion, and five IRA men died in a gun battle at the house during her tenancy. All in all, Killakee House and the surrounding area were imbued with more violence and savagery than most haunted places.

Killakee House lay empty and derelict for some years after the Second World War. In the late 1960s it was bought by Mrs Margaret O'Brien, who wanted a centre in which Irish artists and sculptors could work and exhibit their art. When she moved into the place in

Left: Tom McAssey's painting of the Black Cat of Killakee, which scared him and two companions one night in 1968. The picture now hangs in the house, which is an art centre

Below: the long low bulk of Killakee House stands beneath the hill on which the burnt-out ruin of the Hell Fire Club stands. A prehistoric cairn and a standing stone existed on the hill's summit before these buildings were put up

1968, she heard stories from locals that its grounds were haunted by a black cat the size of an Airedale dog. 'Haunted' was an appropriate term because the stories covered a period of over 50 years – much longer than the life-span of a normal cat.

Mrs O'Brien knew some of the tales related about her new property and its environs, and was rather shaken when she caught glimpses of a 'big black animal' disappearing into the thick shrubbery of her garden. She thought no more about it, however, until her friend Tom McAssey, a Dublin artist, and two colleagues had a terrifying experience one night while re-decorating Killakee House in March 1968. They were working on the stone-flagged front hall, which opened onto what had been a ballroom. McAssey told a radio reporter:

I had just locked the heavy front door, pushing a 6-inch [15-centimetre] bolt into its socket. Suddenly one of the two men with me said that the door had opened again. We turned, startled. The lock was good and the bolt was strong, and both fastened on the inside.

We peered into the shadowed hallway, and then I walked forward, and sure enough the door stood wide open, letting in a cold breeze. Outside in the darkness I could just discern a black-draped figure, but could not see its face. I thought someone was playing a trick





and said: 'Come in. I see you.' A low, guttural voice answered: 'You can't see me. Leave this door open.'

The men standing behind me both heard the voice, but thought it spoke in a foreign language. They ran. A long-drawn-out snore came from the shadow, and in panic I slammed the heavy door and ran too. Halfway across the gallery I turned and looked back. The door was again open and a monstrous black cat crouched in the hall, its red-flecked amber eyes fixed on me.

Beside Killakee House in a trailer, in the wooded grounds lived Val McGann, a former Irish pole-vault champion who painted and showed his work at the gallery. He evinced no surprise at McAssey's story, because he had seen the huge cat on several occasions, lurking in the scraggling undergrowth of the overgrown garden.

'The first time I saw it, it frightened me stiff,' he said, 'but on subsequent occasions I have been more interested and amazed at the size of the beast. It is about the size of a bigish dog, with terrible eyes. I've even stalked it with my shotgun, but have never been able to corner it.'

For some months after McAssey's vision, apparitions were seen by workmen and artists at Killakee. They usually appeared at night, although two men saw what they thought was a nun, with her back to them, at midday in the old ballroom. When they approached her she disappeared, and a subsequent search of the house and garden failed to turn up any evidence of a real figure.

Following reports in the Dublin press and on television of the strange hauntings, a group of Irish show-business personalities

persuaded Mrs O'Brien to let them try a seance in Killakee House. They included a stage conjurer who was an expert on illusions and who believed that he could rule out any 'fakery' on the part of residents.

The group arranged cards carrying the letters of the alphabet in a circle on a table and placed an upturned glass in the centre. Each participant rested one finger lightly on the glass. Those who have tried this well-known technique will know that the glass will slide around the table, from letter to letter, apparently spontaneously, with no one present applying any pressure to it – consciously, at any rate.

The group at Killakee asked any 'spirits' present to manifest themselves – but the 'replies' were gibberish. However, on two occasions the lights failed, although a subsequent check of the fuses revealed no fault, and the light bulbs and wiring appeared to be completely normal.

Two days later, however, events began to take a more frightening turn. First there were bumps and knockings in the night. Lights were switched rapidly on and off.

Bells in the night

Throughout the whole of one night the sound of door bells, in the front and back halls, could be heard. Yet those bells had been removed many years before.

A minor but curious manifestation was the fact that none of the residents – five or six in all – was able to sleep even on 'calm' nights; after retiring to bed exhausted from a heavy day's work, they reported lying awake, tossing and turning and managing to sleep only after sunrise.

About four days after the seance, everyone in the house heard heavy crashes and went to investigate. They found large pieces of furniture – some stored in locked rooms – thrown 'like matchboxes', some upside down, some pushed into corners. One oak medieval chair had been carefully pulled apart, joint from joint; even the brass tacks holding its tapestry in place had been pulled out and placed in neat rows. On the other hand, another similar chair had been smashed into tiny slivers.

After this outbreak, peace descended again for a matter of weeks. Then the 'haunters' turned their attention to exhibits on show in the house: a potter's works were hurled all over the room and smashed, while oil paintings were torn into long narrow strips.

At this point Margaret O'Brien sought the assistance of a priest, who, after obtaining permission from his superiors, performed a Roman Catholic rite of exorcism on Killakee House. The violent outbreaks stopped, but even more bizarre incidents began to occur in their place.

Mrs O'Brien had still not completed furnishing her house, and she lacked a refrigerator. She had asked the milkman to leave the milk in a pool in a cool stream that ran

Left: Countess Markievicz, who occupied Killakee House for a period. She was sentenced to death for her part in the 1916 uprising, but this was commuted to penal servitude for life. She was actually released in 1917 and became a noted Irish politician

Below: the building used by the Hell Fire Club as it was at the height of the society's infamy. It was built about 1725 as a hunting lodge, and commanded magnificent views of the mountains and forests of the surrounding countryside. It was burned down in mysterious circumstances – supposedly during one of the club's orgies of violence





Above: duelling, then a legal activity, claimed the lives of several noblemen at Killakee House during the 18th century. A duel could be substituted for a trial: the defendant had the right to challenge his accuser. Even after the abolition of such 'judicial' duels, personal combat, regulated by strict rules, remained legal between military men until it was finally outlawed in the mid 19th century

through the grounds. After the exorcism, Mrs O'Brien found that all the tinfoil tops had been removed from the bottles, although the milk was undisturbed.

Furthermore, no trace of the foil could be found. Mrs O'Brien assumed that it had been carried off by birds, possibly magpies or jackdaws. To stop the nuisance, she had a heavy four-sided box of stone built in the stream, with a large slate lid. Nevertheless, the caps continued to disappear.

The humour of the hauntings

At this juncture, the 'hauntings' showed a trace of humour as well as causing a rare psychic manifestation called an 'apport' – the sudden appearance of objects through apparently preternatural means. Following the disappearance of the caps from the bottles, 'caps' began to appear in the house itself – but these caps were types of headgear.

After the manifestations, Mrs O'Brien had made a practice of locking and checking all the doors before retiring. Despite this, a profusion of small caps began to appear all over the house. They would appear in odd places – on picture hooks or behind doors. Sometimes, rosary beads would be found, equally inexplicably.

At the end of 1970 the caps ceased to appear, although spasmodic knockings in the night continued to be heard. Then, a few months later, came a discovery that might have had a grim bearing on the whole strange series of incidents. While structural alterations to the kitchen were being made, an excavation for new plumbing was carried out. In

a shallow grave a few feet under the surface was found the skeleton of a dwarf, with a skull too large for its small frame – a sinister echo of the legend told of the Hell Fire Club for so many years. In the grave, too, was a brass figurine, depicting a horned and tailed devil thumbing its nose.

Once again the priest was called, this time to conduct a proper burial service on the unknown unfortunate, and after that the manifestations ceased. Mrs O'Brien sold the premises six years later.

Was the Black Cat of Killakee – later portrayed in oils by Tom McAssey as he had seen it on that frightening night – a manifestation that was attached to the house, or had it somehow been conjured into existence by the new occupants? Were the voices, the bells and the broken furniture results of the seance, which somehow provided a focus for them? Or was the whole series of hauntings provoked by the unhappy ghost of the dwarf, brutally murdered, according to legend, by the drunken bucks of the Hell Fire Club?

It is unlikely that the answer will ever be known for sure, but we do know that all psychical phenomena ceased in 1977, when Joseph Frei took over the unfortunate house and added a restaurant to the art centre's facilities.

'Perhaps the previous owners were, shall we say, unlucky with the place,' he said. 'I and my family have been very happy here – I know about the history of it, but we have only experienced a feeling of warmth and comfort. Perhaps the "hauntings" like what we are doing with their "haunt".'



The Tunguska explosion was the disastrous end of a visitor from space. But was that visitor a spacecraft or a fragment of a comet? IAN RIDPATH describes the latest scientific research and gives his verdict

SIBERIA, 30 JUNE 1908: a brilliant fireball blazed through the Earth's atmosphere, exploding at a height of 5 miles (8 kilometres) above the valley of the Stony Tunguska river with the force of a $12\frac{1}{2}$ -megatonne nuclear bomb. According to one popular theory, the Tunguska explosion really was a nuclear blast, caused by the burn-up of a nuclear-powered alien spacecraft. But another leading theory says the Tunguska object was the head of a small comet. What evidence is there to back up these rival theories?

Important clues to the nature of the Tunguska explosion were obtained on three expeditions to the site, in 1958, 1961 and 1962, led by Soviet geochemist Kirill Florensky. His 1962 expedition used a helicopter to chart the disaster area. Instead of looking for large meteoritic fragments, as Leonid Kulik had done in the late 1920s, Florensky's team sifted the soil for microscopic particles that would have been scattered by the burn-up and disintegration of the Tunguska object. Their search proved fruitful. The scientists traced a narrow tongue of cosmic dust stretching for 150 miles (250 kilometres) north-west of the site, composed of magnetite (magnetic iron oxide) and glassy droplets of fused rock. The expedition found thousands of examples of metal and silicate particles fused together, indicating that the

Below: Willard F. Libby, one of a team who thought they had found an increase in atmospheric radioactive carbon-14 following the Tunguska explosion

Bottom: within a year of the explosion, Tunguska looked like this: fresh green growth pushing through the dead timber



Tunguska object had not been of uniform composition. A low-density stony composition containing flecks of iron is believed to be typical of interplanetary debris, particularly meteors ('shooting stars'), which are themselves composed of dust from comets. The particles spread north-west of the Tunguska blast were apparently the vaporised remains of a comet's head.

These actual samples of the Tunguska object should have been enough to settle the controversy once and for all. Florensky wrote about his expeditions in a 1963 article in the magazine *Sky & Telescope*. The article was entitled, 'Did a comet collide with the Earth in 1908?' Among astronomers, the comet theory has always been the front runner. In his article, Florensky said that this viewpoint 'was now confirmed'.

Radiation check

Florensky's expedition carefully checked for the existence of radiation at the site. He reported that the only radioactivity in the trees from the Tunguska area was fallout from atomic tests, which had been absorbed into the wood. Florensky's party also looked in detail at the acceleration of forest growth in the devastated area, which some had put down to genetic damage from radiation. Biologists concluded that only the normal acceleration of growth after a fire, a well-known phenomenon, had taken place.

But what of the 'scabs' reported to have broken out on reindeer after the blast? In the absence of any veterinary report one can only speculate, but most likely these were not

What really happened at Tunguska?

caused by atomic radiation but simply by the great flash of heat given out by the blast, which also set fire to the trees. Humans near enough to have felt the heat of the fireball showed no signs of radiation sickness, and remained alive and healthy when Leonid Kulik visited the site over a dozen years later.

Believers in the nuclear explosion theory quote investigations in 1965 by three American physicists, Clyde Cowan, C.R. Atluri, and Willard Libby, who reported a 1 per cent increase in radiocarbon in tree rings following the Tunguska blast. A nuclear explosion releases a burst of neutrons, which turn atmospheric nitrogen into radioactive carbon-14 that is taken up by plants along with ordinary carbon during their normal photosynthesis. If the Tunguska blast were nuclear, excess radiocarbon would be expected in the plants growing at the time.

To test this prediction, the American scientists examined tree rings from a 300-year-old Douglas fir from the Catalina Mountains near Tucson, Arizona, and also from an ancient oak tree near Los Angeles. They found that the level of radiocarbon in the rings of both trees had jumped by 1 per cent from 1908 to 1909. The picture is confused by erratic fluctuations of up to 2 per cent that exist in the levels of radiocarbon measured in the tree rings from year to year. Therefore a 1 per cent radiocarbon increase is not outside the range of normal fluctuations caused by natural effects. An important double-check was made by three Dutch scientists on a tree from Trondheim, Norway – much nearer the blast, where the radiocarbon effects would be expected to be more noticeable. Instead of a radiocarbon rise in 1909, they found a steady decrease around that time. Therefore the increase in American trees found by Cowan, Atluri and Libby must be due to local effects – and not to the Tunguska blast.

Pattern of destruction

Lastly, what about the clump of trees left standing at the centre of the Tunguska blast area, as were trees under the explosion point of the Hiroshima bomb, and the 'fiery pillar' seen after the explosion? In fact, these effects are not unique to a nuclear blast. Any explosion is followed by an updraught of heated air and a puff of smoke. Brilliant exploding fireballs happen frequently as chunks of solar system debris plunge into the atmosphere; fortunately for us, most of them are far smaller than the Tunguska object.

The clump of standing trees would be left behind by an aerial explosion of any kind, as shown by the scale-model experiments of Igor Zotkin and Mikhail Tsikulin of the Soviet Academy of Sciences' meteorite committee. They set off small explosions over a field of model trees, and found they were able to reproduce the pattern of felled trees including the central standing clump.

Therefore it seems that all the 'evidence'



The healing processes of the Siberian forest have not yet obliterated the scars of the 1908 explosion. Within a few years saplings had grown between the trunks strewn on the ground (top). But even today the fallen trees are still evident beneath a covering of moss and foliage (above)

adduced for a nuclear explosion at Tunguska is either misinterpretation or mischievous distortion.

Remarkably, the Tunguska event was repeated on a smaller scale over North America on the night of 31 March 1965. An area of nearly 390,000 square miles (1 million square kilometres) of the United States and Canada was lit up by the descent of a body that detonated over the towns of Revelstoke and Golden, 250 miles (400 kilometres) south-west of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Residents of those towns spoke of a 'thunderous roar' that rattled and broke windows. The energy released was equal to several kilotonnes of TNT.

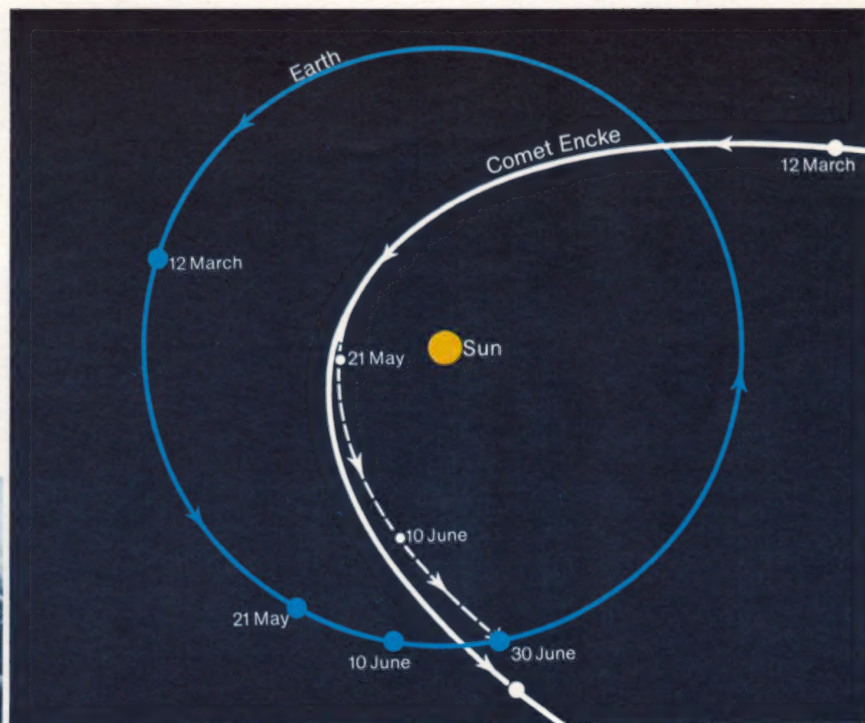
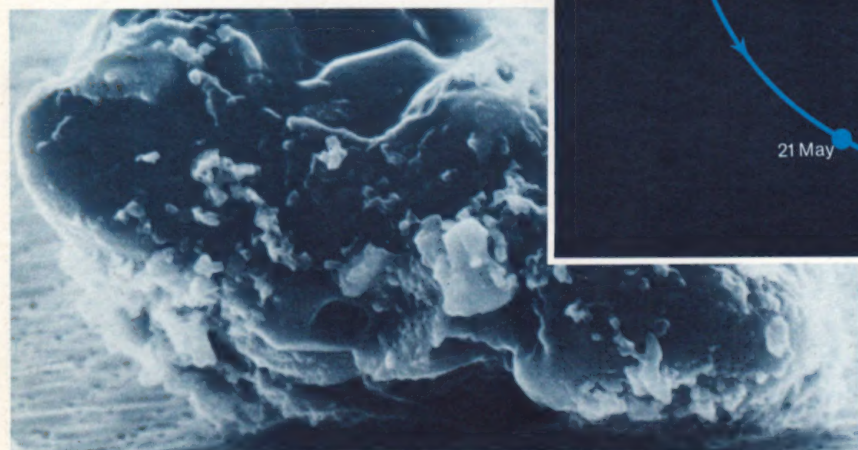
Scientists predicted the meteorite's point of impact and set out to look for a crater, much as Leonid Kulik had done in Siberia half a century before. Like him, they were unsuccessful. Scanning the snow-covered ground from the air, the scientists were unable to find traces of the meteorite, or of a crater. Only when investigators went into the area on foot did they find that a strange black dust coated the snow for miles around. Samples of this dirt were scraped up, and proved to have the composition of a particularly fragile type of stony meteorite known as a carbonaceous chondrite (see page 368). The Revelstoke object fragmented in mid-air, raining thousands of tonnes of crumbly black dust upon the snow. Significantly, witnesses to the Tunguska blast described just such a 'black rain'.

Clinching evidence for the cometary nature of the Tunguska object comes from

Tunguska explosion

the results of the latest Soviet expeditions to the site, reported in 1977. Microscopic rocky particles found in the 1908 peat layers have the same composition as cosmic particles collected from the upper atmosphere by rockets. Thousands of tonnes of this material are estimated to be scattered around the fall area. Along with these particles of rock from space were jagged particles of meteoric iron. The Soviet researchers concluded that the Tunguska object was a comet of carbonaceous chondrite composition. This comes as no surprise, for astronomers are finding that a carbonaceous chondrite composition is typical of interplanetary debris.

But if it was a comet, why was it not seen in



the sky prior to impact? Firstly, it always stayed close to the Sun so that it was lost in glare; and secondly, it was too small to have ever become bright enough to see even in a dark sky. Astronomers now believe that the Tunguska object was actually a fragment broken several thousand years ago from Comet Encke, an old and faint comet with the shortest known orbit of any comet around the Sun. A Czech astronomer, Lubor Kresak, pointed out in 1976 that the orbit of the Tunguska object, deduced from the direction and angle at which it struck the Earth, is remarkably similar to that of Encke's comet. Dr Kresak estimates that the body had a diameter of only about 100 yards (100 metres) when in space, and a mass of up to a million tonnes. Dust from its disintegration in the atmosphere caused the bright nights observed in the northern hemisphere in the period following the Tunguska event.

'The identification of the Tunguska object as an extinct cometary fragment appears to be the only plausible explanation of the event; and a common origin with Comet Encke appears very probable,' concludes Dr Kresak.

What is more, an event like Tunguska can happen again. Astronomers have found a number of small asteroids whose orbits cross the path of the Earth. For instance, in 1976 a direct repetition of the Tunguska event was avoided by hours as a previously unknown asteroid with a diameter of a few hundred yards swept past the Earth at a distance of 750,000 miles (1.2 million kilometres). Astronomers estimate that an object the size of the Tunguska comet hits the Earth once in about 2000 years on average. So it is only a matter of time before we are hit again – and next time it could do a lot of damage.



Top: how the Tunguska explosion may have happened. The comet Encke could have shed a rock fragment that was captured by the Earth

Above: this dust grain, magnified 10,000 times, was collected in the stratosphere. It is thought to have come from a comet

Left: the rings of recent Tunguska trees (top) are thicker than those of trees killed in the disaster (bottom). Some scientists claim that radioactivity from the explosion caused a spurt in plant growth

Further reading

John Baxter and Thomas Atkins, *The fire came by*, Macdonald and Jane's 1976

Jack Stoneley, *Tunguska, cauldron of hell*, Star 1977

Ronald D. Story (ed.), *The encyclopedia of UFOs*, New English Library 1980

Post script

Your letters to
THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,

As a member of the Society for Psychical Research, I was intrigued to read your article on Harry Price (issue 32 of *The Unexplained*) and the attack on him by fellow members.

I have read some articles on Price's work at Borley Rectory, and I must say that if Borley was a 'big con' then it would have involved four families from 1863 to 1935 and eight people who worked with Price. I think it is worth noting that the church at Borley was investigated and the results were shown on television. Could it be that the film was a fake?

Yours faithfully,

Derek Dilkes

Manchester

Dear Sir,

I really must protest at Mr Guy Lyon Playfair's biased account of Harry Price's investigations at Borley Rectory, which seems to condemn the case as bad ghost hunting.

I notice that Mr Playfair carefully avoids the fact that Price set up nearly 50 totally dispassionate investigators at Borley from 1937 to 1938, and that members of the Cambridge Commission of 1939 to 1944, set up by Dr A.J.B. Robertson and including many other responsible persons, experienced unusual disturbances at the rectory, which were most marked during Price's 12-month tenure. There are also the testimonies of Mr James Turner, a writer who occupied the rectory cottage in more recent times, and a host of other occurrences to be found in *The ghosts of Borley* by Peter Underwood and Paul Tabori, which is an unbiased account.

Let us examine the account in more detail. Mr Playfair seems to think that Price said the rectory was 'built on the site of a monastery'. Price did not believe this, and had Mr Playfair read Price's *The most haunted house in England* and *The end of Borley Rectory* properly he would have discovered this. Indeed in one book Price added a footnote to a newspaper account that stated that the reporter believed 'the rectory was built on a monastery' saying 'this is doubtful'.

Mr Playfair says that 'a former occupant of the rectory' (Mrs G.E. Smith, although he does not say so) believed the rectory to be haunted by nothing 'but rats and local superstition'. She wrote this 15 years after leaving Borley, when perhaps she could accept a more cynical approach. There is evidence that she bore a grudge against Price for not helping to get a book of hers published.

Convincing though Mr Playfair may at first appear with regard to the 19th-century haunting near Amherst in Nova Scotia, I would remind him that the Reverend L.A. Foyster lived near Amherst 30 years after the haunting, so the chances of him knowing of it are not very great; nor were there a large number of similarities between the two cases as Mr Playfair suggests. Price called Borley 'the best authenticated case of haunting in the annals of psychical research' because of the many investigations that had been carried out and because of the fact that the haunting of Borley is at least 100 years old.

The 1956 SPR report may have much to commend it – I have not read it as it is inaccessible – but the

testimony of the *Daily Mail* reporter Charles Sutton is itself torn apart in *The ghosts of Borley*. He is shown as an inconsistent man who changed his reports frequently. In fact, Price's secretary had no memory of any stones being thrown that night; and how could Price have carried bricks and pebbles in his pockets inconspicuously? It is as well that Sutton's story was 'killed', because it seems to be a tissue of lies.

Mr Playfair's cheap and partisan account is a disgusting way to treat Price (who is not here to answer for himself) and the many who experienced the phenomena at Borley, who are thus indicted on charges of exaggeration. If there is no reason to believe a word of Price's Borley books, then Mr Playfair's account of the Enfield poltergeist in *This house is haunted* certainly must come under scrutiny. Even if Price did exaggerate and over-publicise the Borley case, many others did not.

Yours faithfully,

A.C. Cartwright

Boston, Lincolnshire

Copies of these two letters were sent to Guy Lyon Playfair, who replied:

I do not suggest that the whole Borley story was a 'big con', nor that the film made in the church was a fake. It is quite possible that some paranormal events did take place at the rectory, but it is unlikely that we shall ever know the facts. As for the film, it added nothing to our knowledge of the case, proving only that unexplained noises are heard in churches at night!

The 1956 report to which Mr Cartwright refers is not at all inaccessible. It is still available from the Society for Psychical Research as Part 186 (volume 51) of their *Proceedings*, and *The haunting of Borley Rectory* by E.J. Dingwall, K.M. Goldney and T.H. Hall, although out of print, should still be available through public libraries. Many of the points Mr Cartwright raises are dealt with in this very thorough report in far more detail than I am able to provide in this limited space. I would also recommend the September 1979 issue of the *SPR Journal*, which contains some reminiscences by the former Mrs Foyster that do not exactly enhance Price's reputation.

Harry Price was an excellent writer, but in the virtually unanimous opinion of experienced researchers who knew him well, serious psychical research was well down on his list of priorities, and there are very sound reasons for doubting his accounts of many of his major cases – including Borley.

Mr Cartwright correctly states that my own ghost-hunting efforts, as reported in *This house is haunted*, 'certainly must come under scrutiny'. They already have. A special SPR committee has carried out a lengthy follow-up study of the Enfield poltergeist case, and both my colleague Maurice Grosse and I gave it full co-operation.

It is perhaps ironic that Price began his career as a debunker of psychic phenomena only to end up getting the same treatment himself – and I certainly regret that the SPR waited until after his death before having a go at him. But I must repeat that, as I wrote in *The Unexplained*, Price made no useful contribution to our understanding of ghosts. He might have, but love of fame and fortune got the better of him.

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES - 21
Statue menhirs at Filitosa, Corsica

